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S E C R E T STATE 030978 TOSEC 030022

FROM SAUNDERS AND HABIB

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: CH, PINT, PFOR, PGOV

SUBJECT: HUA KUO-FENG NAMED PRC ACTING PREMIER

1. IN A SURPRISE MOVE, UNPRECEDENTED SINCE THE LIN PIAO CRISIS OF 1971, NCNA HAS REVEALED THAT SIXTH-RANKED VICE PREMIER AND ELEVENTH-RANKED POLITBURO MEMBER HUA KUO-FENG HAS BEEN NAMED THE PRC'S ACTING PREMIER. THIS CABLE PRESENTS EA'S AND INR'S PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF HUA'S ELEVATION AND TENG HSIAO-P'ING'S DEMOTION AND OF THE IMPLICATIONS OF THESE EVENTS FOR SINO-US RELATIONS.

2. PEOPLE'S DAILY ATTACK: THE FEBRUARY 7 DISCLOSURE OF HUA'S APPOINTMENT FOLLOWED A STARTLING FEBRUARY 6 PEOPLE'S DAILY ARTICLE WHICH ATTACKED "CAPITALIST ROADERS ... IN POWER INSIDE THE PARTY" WHO WERE ACCUSED OF ADHERING TO THE "REVISIONIST LINE OF LIU SHAO-CH'I AND LIN PIAO." WRITTEN

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WITH EXPLICIT REFERENCE TO CHINA'S ON-GOING EDUCATION

CAMPAIGN, THE ARTICLE NONETHELESS APPEARED AIMED AT HIGHER-LEVEL PEOPLE THAN THOSE ASSOCIATED WITH EDUCATION MINISTER CHOU JUNG-HSIN, WHO HAD BEEN THE FOCUS OF THAT CAMPAIGN IN NOVEMBER LAST YEAR. COUCHED IN FIGHTING TERMS NOT HEARD SINCE THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION, THE ARTICLE SUGGESTED THAT ONE OR MORE TOP PARTY PERSONS, AND MOST LIKELY TENG HIMSELF, WERE UNDER ATTACK. THE DISCLOSURE OF HUA'S APPOINTMENT A DAY LATER CONFIRMED THAT TENG HAD ENCOUNTERED MAJOR PROBLEMS IN ASSUMING CHOU'S MANTLE AS PREMIER, AND HAD PERHAPS AGAIN FALLEN VICTIM TO LEFTIST ATTACKS.

3. LEADERSHIP CLEAVAGES AND THE SUCCESSION: WHETHER OR NOT THE PASSING OVER OF TENG IS PERMANENT, HIS APPARENT FAILURE TO BE NAMED AS CHOU'S SUCCESSOR IS A MAJOR SETBACK AND DEMOTION. IT DEMONSTRATES THAT, DESPITE CAREFULLY PLANNED EFFORTS, CLEAVAGES IN THE CHINESE LEADERSHIP PERSIST AND ARE SUFFICIENTLY GRAVE TO PREVENT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF WHAT HAD SEEMED AN ORDERLY SUCCESSION SCENARIO. IT APPEARS LIKELY THAT RECENT CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEETINGS PRODUCED A SERIES OF STRUGGLES BETWEEN "MODERATES" AND "LEFTISTS," IN WHICH NEITHER SIDE PREVAILED. HUA'S SELECTION HAS THE APPEARANCE OF A COMPROMISE. HE IS A MAN THOUGHT TO BE CLOSE TO MAO AND ONE WHO APPARENTLY COMMANDS THE RESPECT OF A WIDE NUMBER OF LEADERS.

4. WITH AN ACTING PREMIER NOW IN PLACE, IT IS UNCLEAR WHAT THE NEXT STEP WILL BE IN THE SUCCESSION PROCESS. ONE POSSIBILITY IS THAT HUA'S APPOINTMENT MAY BE A STOP-GAP MEASURE TO FORESTALL FURTHER FACTIONAL IN-FIGHTING AND THAT HE WILL SERVE ONLY UNTIL A FINAL CANDIDATE CAN BE AGREED UPON. IN THIS CASE IT COULD BE SOME TIME BEFORE THE SECOND DECISION IS MADE BY THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE AND FORMALLY RATIFIED BY THE NATIONAL PEOPLE'S CONGRESS (NPC). IT IS EQUALLY LIKELY, HOWEVER, THAT THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE HAS ALREADY AGREED ON HUA'S APPOINTMENT TO THE PREMIERSHIP AND THAT THIS DECISION WILL BE FORMALLY ENDORSED SOME TIME IN UPCOMING WEEKS BY THE NPC. IN ANY CASE, HUA'S BACKGROUND CREDENTIALS QUALIFY HIM FOR THE TOP GOVERNMENT POST, AND HIS CHANCES FOR SUCCEEDING CHOU PERMANENTLY WILL OBVIOUSLY BE ENHANCED BY HIS NEW ROLE.

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5. WHILE HUA MAY REPLACE CHOU IN THE GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE, IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHAT THE NEW LINEUP WILL BE WITHIN THE UPPER ECHELONS OF THE PARTY. IT IS UNCERTAIN, FOR EXAMPLE, WHETHER HUA'S RAPID RISE IN GOVERNMENT POSITIONS WILL BE MATCHED BY HIS APPOINTMENT TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE OF THE POLITBURO OR TO A PARTY VICE CHAIRMANSHIP. MOREOVER, WHILE TENG APPEARS TO HAVE SLIPPED BADLY, WE DO

NOT ENTIRELY DISCOUNT THE POSSIBILITY OF A CONTINUED ROLE FOR HIM WITHIN THE PARTY. WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT LIES IN STORE RESPECTING HIS POSITION AS CHIEF OF STAFF OF THE PLA.

6. IMPLICATIONS FOR SINO-US RELATIONS: WE DO NOT FORESEE RADICAL DEPARTURES IN PRC FOREIGN POLICY AS A RESULT OF THESE SURPRISING DEVELOPMENTS, THOUGH THERE MAY BE IMPORTANT CHANGES IN STYLE AND--ASSUMING THE LEADERSHIP SITUATION IS NOT RAPIDLY RESOLVED--EVEN MORE DIFFICULTY COPING WITH DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICY PROBLEMS. HUA'S ELEVATION TO ACTING PREMIER CAME ON THE SAME DAY THAT FORMER PRESIDENT AND MRS. NIXON WERE PUBLICLY INVITED TO VISIT CHINA, IN WHAT SEEMS TO BE A SYMBOLIC REAFFIRMATION OF THE BASIC TENETS OF THE SHANGHAI COMMUNIQUE AND THE SINO-US RELATIONSHIP. WE BELIEVE THAT HUA'S PROMOTION IS PRIMARILY THE RESULT OF INTERNAL POLITICAL FACTORS WHICH APPEAR TO HAVE LITTLE DIRECT RELATION TO FOREIGN AFFAIRS. WITH MAO STILL ON THE SCENE AND A MAN THOUGHT TO BE CLOSE TO HIM IN THE PREMIERSHIP, FUNDAMENTAL PRC POLICY TOWARD THE US AND THE USSR SHOULD REMAIN UNCHANGED. HOWEVER, TENG'S UNANTICIPATED SETBACK CLEARLY DEMONSTRATES THAT CHINA'S LEADERSHIP SITUATION IS FLUID, AND THIS FACTOR MAY ULTIMATELY IMPINGE ON CHINA'S APPROACH TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD.

7. ALTHOUGH WE SEE NO EVIDENCE THAT THE US/PRC RELATIONSHIP WAS A FACTOR IN THIS DEVELOPMENT, WE MUST BE PARTICULARLY VIGILANT TO AVOID ACTIONS OR STATEMENTS WHICH COULD ENTANGLE US IN CHINA'S LEADERSHIP STRUGGLE.

8. FORMER PRESIDENT NIXON'S VISIT TO THE PRC BEGINNING FEBRUARY 21 MAY PROVIDE SOME ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS INTO
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THE IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR RELATIONS WITH THE PRC OF TENG'S UNEXPECTED DIFFICULTIES. ALTHOUGH THE MOST AUTHORITATIVE STATEMENTS WILL COME FROM CHAIRMAN MAO, THERE IS A REASONABLE POSSIBILITY THAT MR. NIXON WILL ALSO SEE THE NEW ACTING PREMIER, AND THEIR CONVERSATION MAY CAST SOME LIGHT ON ANY SHADINGS IN HUA'S OWN VIEWS OF THE UNITED STATES. WE WILL BE TAKING THIS INTO ACCOUNT IN THE BRIEFING PAPER WHICH YOU ASKED US TO PREPARE FOR MR. NIXON'S VISIT.

9. BIOGRAPHY: HUA KUO-FENG, IN HIS MID-FIFTIES, COMES FROM MAO'S NATIVE PROVINCE OF HUNAN. HE WAS ELEVATED TO THE CCP POLITBURO IN AUGUST 1973 AND NAMED VICE PREMIER AND MINISTER OF PUBLIC SECURITY AT THE JANUARY 1975 NATIONAL PEOPLE'S CONGRESS. THOUGH HE MAY HAVE SOME

MILITARY EXPERIENCE, HE IS BASICALLY A CIVILIAN. HUA'S APPOINTMENT AS MINISTER OF PUBLIC SECURITY CAME AT A TIME WHEN CHINA WAS EXPERIENCING SERIOUS FACTIONAL DISRUPTIONS AND LABOR STRIFE AT LOCAL LEVELS IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE DISRUPTIVE ANTI-CONFUCIUS, ANTI-LIN PIAO CAMPAIGN IN 1974. HIS APPOINTMENT SEEMED TO REFLECT BROAD LEADERSHIP CONFIDENCE IN HIS ABILITIES AND POLITICAL CREDENTIALS FOR DEALING WITH CHINA'S INTERNAL PROBLEMS. IN THE PAST YEAR, HUA APPARENTLY PLAYED A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN ATTEMPTING TO RESOLVE FACTIONAL DISPUTES IN CHEKIANG, YUNAN AND SZECHUAN PROVINCES, AND MET WITH SOME SUCCESS. HIS RESPONSIBILITIES ALSO EXTENDED TO OTHER AREAS. IN OCTOBER HE GAVE THE KEYNOTE ADDRESS TO A NATION-WIDE CONFERENCE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHINA'S AGRICULTURE, STRIKING A BALANCE BETWEEN RAPID AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT AND FIRM PARTY CONTROL AT ALL LEVELS. HIS PUBLIC APPEARANCES INDICATE THAT HE IS THE TOP PARTY MAN IN THE AGRICULTURAL SPHERE.

10. LITTLE IS KNOWN OF HUA'S PRE-1949 ACTIVITIES AND HIS EARLY CAREER. HE HAD BEEN ACTIVE IN HIS NATIVE HUNAN AS A PROVINCIAL OFFICIAL SINCE AT LEAST 1955. HE CAME TO PROMINENCE IN THE LATTER STAGES OF THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION WHEN, WITH THE SUPPORT OF MAO, HE TOOK A LEADING ROLE IN RESTORING ORDER TO THE TROUBLED PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT THERE. HE WAS ELECTED TO THE NINTH CCP CENTRAL COMMITTEE

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IN 1969, AND IN THE EARLY 1970'S HE BEGAN TO TAKE MORE OF AN ACTIVE ROLE IN NATIONAL POLITICS, TRAVELING FREQUENTLY TO PEKING AND HOLDING OTHER IMPORTANT REGIONAL POSTS. HUA'S POLITICAL AFFINITIES ARE UNKNOWN AND HE DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE IDENTIFIED WITH ANY PARTICULAR FACTIONAL GROUP. SISCO

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